

HAT BUTTE WELLS
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-025-00-29

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

NOVEMBER 2000

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I. INTRODUCTION

The proposed project is to construct livestock water developments to be located in T. 23 S., R. 24 E., Section 8 and Section 27, within the Hat Butte Allotment, approximately 20 miles west of Riley, Oregon.

A. Purpose of and Need for Action

Reliable water sources are needed to provide stock water to achieve better distribution of livestock grazing in this allotment, currently dependent on a number of small reservoirs that fill with runoff in the early spring but later dry up. The grazing permittee has hauled water in the past, but this has been costly and time-consuming. The grazing permit allows use through October 31, and some of the reservoirs normally are dry by August (or sooner in a dry year). This concentrates the grazing use at the few remaining reservoirs, which prove to be inadequate.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plans

The project is consistent with the objectives of the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan approved August 5, 1992. The wells would conform to the standard procedures and design elements identified for range improvements under this plan.

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to allow the grazing permittee, at his own expense, to drill and equip two water wells, one in each pasture of the Hat Butte Allotment. The well sites were picked based on the probability of water being located there. The wells would be cased with steel pipe and sealed with concrete. Each well would have a steel storage tank painted to blend with the surrounding landscape and a galvanized steel trough. Wildlife escape ramps would be installed in all troughs. The well site in the Upper Pasture (in Section 8) is on a power line and would have an electrical transformer when it is placed into operation. The other well site (in the Lower Pasture in Section 27) is about 0.5-mile away from the power line.

Initially, it would be operated with a generator, but eventually 0.5-mile of power line and a transformer would be installed. The transformers would have safety devices to prevent electrocution of raptors, and perch guards would be installed on all new power poles. Prior to construction, a site-specific botanical clearance would be completed.

B. Alternative 1: No Action

The no action alternative would be to not construct the wells. The permittee would be required to either haul water to his cattle or move them off the allotment when the reservoirs dry up.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The critical elements of the human environment that are either not present or obviously not affected by the proposed action or the no action alternative are floodplains, wilderness, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, water quality, air quality, prime or unique farmlands, paleontological resources, Wild and Scenic Rivers, wetlands, American Indian religious concerns, hazardous wastes, and Environmental Justice.

A. Vegetation

The vegetation at the well site in Section 8 is dominated by juniper, big sagebrush, and annuals. This site has been used for water hauling in the past, and so it is in the middle of a small disturbed area with poor range condition, with additional disturbance caused by the adjacent road, power line, and cinder pit (highway materials site). The vegetation at the well site in Section 27 is in more natural condition, with Idaho fescue, big sagebrush, and low sagebrush being the dominant species.

B. Wildlife

Pronghorn antelope use the areas involved, and the Hat Butte Allotment has been identified as mule deer summer and winter range. A variety of small birds and mammals, including sage grouse, are found in the vicinity.

C. Threatened and Endangered Species

There are no known threatened or endangered species at either of the two well sites. Sage grouse, a Special Status species, are likely to be occasionally present. The nearest known lek is about 5 miles away and the area is not known to be nesting habitat. The location of the sage grouse wintering areas are largely unknown in the Burns District.

D. Cultural Resources

The two sites have been surveyed by a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologist, and no cultural resources were found.

E. Recreation

Occasional use by hunters would be the main recreational activity. Easy road access from Highway 20 brings some use by sightseers and tourists.

F. Visual Resources

The project is within a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) zone (allows modification of the landscape character).

G. Soils

Soils are well-drained clay loams with only slight erosion hazard. The soil at the well site in Section 27 is shallower and rockier than at the other site.

H. Invasive, Nonnative Species

No noxious weeds are currently identified in the locations involved.

I. Water Rights

The nearest water wells are located outside the allotment. These are the Gap Ranch Well about 3 miles away from one proposed well site and the Glass Butte Well about 4.5 miles from the other proposed well site. According to Oregon State water law, the proposed wells do not need water rights because they will be used for stock water, and stock water is an "exempt use."

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Vegetation

Proposed Action:

Small areas of vegetation would be displaced by installation of the troughs and holding tanks. Intensive grazing around the troughs could result in deteriorated range condition in the immediate vicinity (roughly 5 acres around each trough), but the current grazing management scheme of providing two consecutive years of total rest out of every 4-year

period would minimize any losses of desirable forage species. The well location in Section 8 already shows deteriorated vegetative conditions, and there would be no appreciable change. The wells would improve grazing distribution, resulting in some recovery of vegetation around the existing reservoirs where current use has concentrated.

No Action:

Water hauling would result in the same environmental consequences as the proposed action, and the permittee would likely haul water to these locations if the wells are not approved.

B. Wildlife

Proposed Action:

The new water sources would also be available to wildlife during the times the wells are operating, therefore wildlife would probably benefit from the project.

No Action:

Wildlife water in the area would continue to come from the existing reservoirs (and water hauling for cattle), with no impacts to wildlife resulting from the no action alternative.

C. Threatened and Endangered Species

Neither the proposed action nor the alternative would have any impact on threatened or endangered species.

D. Cultural Resources

No impacts to cultural resources would result from either the proposed action or the alternative.

E. Recreation

Neither the proposed action nor the alternative would affect recreation. Possibly the presence of water, either from wells or hauled by truck, would make wildlife more visible and easier to look at or hunt.

F. Visual Resources

Proposed Action:

The visual impacts of the new wells and associated tanks and troughs would be well within the VRM guidelines for a Class IV area. The project sites are not visible from the highway.

No Action:

If water hauling is used instead of wells, the visual impact would be much the same as the proposed action, except the facilities would be more easily moved away if necessary and the 0.5-mile of new power line would not be built.

G. Soils

Proposed Action:

Some compaction of soils would occur in the immediate area of each well.

No Action:

Impacts to soil would be very minimal under the no action alternative, especially if water hauling sites are varied from year to year and only used under very dry conditions.

H. Invasive, Nonnative Species

Proposed Action:

Wells, because of the disturbance and concentrated livestock use, are often places where noxious weeds get established. There is a potential for this happening, but the lack of nearby noxious species makes the risk lower than in most other places in the Resource Area.

No Action:

Noxious weeds could also establish in areas where water hauling by truck occurs, so the effects of not allowing the wells would be very similar to the effects of the proposed action, as long as water hauling continues.

I. Water Rights

Proposed Action:

Drilling wells would mean tapping the ground water reservoir, but the distance involved to the nearest wells suggests no impacts should be expected.

No Action:

Not allowing the new wells would make it certain no impacts to other water wells would occur.

V. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Given that the closest wells are 3 miles and 4.5 miles away, no cumulative impacts on the ground water reservoir were identified. One-half mile of power line would be added to the existing power lines. No other cumulative impacts would occur.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Participating Staff

Rudy Hefter, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Tim Kramer, Watershed Specialist
Craig Martell, Range Technician
Brian McCabe, Archaeologist
Fred McDonald, Natural Resource Specialist
Willie Street, Range Management Specialist
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, Botanist

B. Persons, Groups or Agencies Consulted

Dick Raney, Permittee

VII. APPENDIX

Location Map

Appe

Three Rivers R.A.

T. 23 S., R. 24 E.

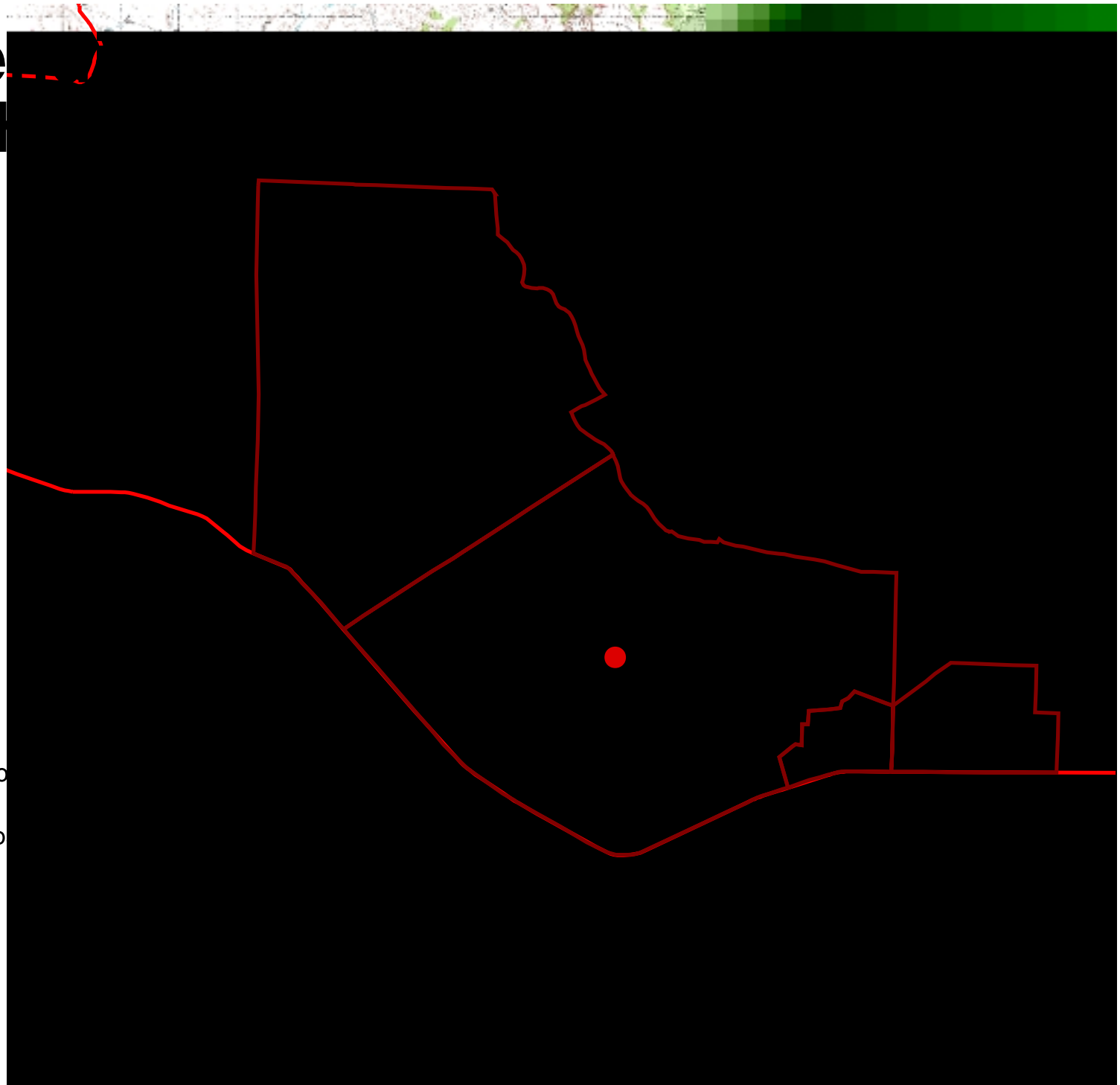
Quad: Hat Butte,
Potato Hills

● Upper Hat Butte Well (Propo

● Lower Hat Butte Well (Propo

↗ Roads (major)

3 0 3 6 Miles



USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Three Rivers Resource Area, Burns District
Hines, Oregon 97738

Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Hat Butte Wells
EA-OR-025-2000-18

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Burns District, Three Rivers Resource Area has analyzed a proposed action to develop two water wells to provide reliable water sources for livestock and wildlife in the Hat Butte Allotment located west of Riley, Oregon, in Harney County. This proposal is in conformance with objectives and land use plan allocations in the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). It is in conformance with the objectives stated in the August 12, 1997 Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington. It is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, Section 2(c) and 7(a)1.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and all other information, I have determined that the proposal and alternative analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the Hat Butte Wells EA have been disclosed. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Three Rivers Resource Area.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, regional or local air quality, water quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources, wetlands, floodplains, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. There would be no adverse impacts from invasive, nonnative species.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.

5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of the Three Rivers RMP, 1992.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural resource surveys, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and adversely affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice policy.
9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. If at a future time there could be the potential for adverse impacts, guidelines or stipulations would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or a new analysis would be conducted.
10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

Craig M. Hansen
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

Date